

COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

GOALS

- 1.** To raise the aesthetic quality of the City.
- 2.** To strengthen the economy through high quality development.
- 3.** To ensure that a high quality of life is maintained as Renton evolves.

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COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

Purpose Statement: The purpose of the Community Design Element is to establish policies that set standards for high quality development, improve the aesthetics and functionality of existing neighborhoods and commercial areas, and guide the development of new neighborhoods.

Recognizing that the exceptional quality of life in Renton is dependent upon a strong local economy, these policies are intended to further that economic health. They are based on the belief that a positive image and high quality attracts more of the same, so that high standards can lead to increased revenue.

Goals:

1. To raise the aesthetic quality of the City,
2. To strengthen the economy through high quality development, and
3. To ensure that a high quality of life is maintained as Renton evolves.

Discussion:

The objectives and policies adopted to meet these goals address issues related to both the natural and built environment such as: how the physical organization of development can create a desirable place to live; the importance of view protection; ways to improve the streetscape; principles of vegetation preservation, selection, and maintenance; principles of architectural and urban design; and the function of urban separators.

I. Natural Areas

Summary: Natural areas are an important component of the community. The purpose of including natural areas in the Community Design Element is not so that natural areas will be “designed,” but rather so that the built environment can be shaped in a manner that takes into consideration the natural environment.

The Community Design Natural Areas objectives are intended to address:

- Urban growth in relation to natural areas,
- Protection and enhancement of natural areas, and
- Public access to natural areas.

Objective CD-A: The City's unique natural features, including land form, vegetation, lakeshore, river, creeks and streams, and wetlands should be protected and enhanced as opportunities arise.

Policy CD-1: Integrate development into natural areas by clustering development and/or adjusting site plans to preserve wetlands, steep slopes, and notable stands of trees or other vegetation. Natural features should function as site amenities. Use incentives such as flexible lot size and configuration to encourage preservation and add amenity value.

Policy CD-2: During development, effort should be made to preserve watercourses as open channels.

Policy CD-3: Site design should maximize public access to and create opportunities for use of shoreline areas in locations contiguous to a lake, river, stream, or wetland where such access would not jeopardize habitats and other environmental attributes of the water body.

Policy CD-4: Development review of proposed projects should identify opportunities for increasing public access to Lake Washington, the Cedar River, wetlands, streams, and creeks in the City.

Policy CD-5: Renton's public and private open space should be increased in size through acquisition of additional land or dedication of Native Growth Protection Area easements.

Policy CD-6: Public open space acquisition should be consistent with the Long Range Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan Policy.

II. Urban Separators

Summary: Urban Separators are low-density residential areas, intended to establish edges between Renton and other communities. These transition areas will become more important as urban areas intensify.

In some areas, natural features such as stream courses, landform, and vegetation already serve as buffers.

These policies are implemented by the Resource Conservation and Residential 1 zoning designations. The Urban Separator policies should be considered along with Residential Low Density policies.

Objective CD-B: Designate low-density residential and resource areas as Urban Separators to provide physical and visual distinctions between Renton and adjacent communities, and to define Renton's boundaries.

Policy CD-7. The function of Urban Separators should be to:

- a. reinforce the character of the City,
- b. establish clear boundaries between the City and other communities,
- c. Separate high-density urban land uses from low-density uses and resource lands, and
- d. Protect environmentally sensitive or critical areas.

Policy CD-8. Locational criteria should consider the following types of lands for designation as Urban Separators:

- a. Individual and interconnecting natural features, critical areas, public and private open space and water features.
- b. Existing and proposed individual and interconnecting parks, and agricultural areas.
- c. Areas that provide a logical and easily identifiable physical separation between urban communities.

III. Established Neighborhoods

Objective CD-C: Promote re-investment in and upgrade of existing neighborhoods through redevelopment of small, underutilized parcels, modification and alteration of older housing stock, and improvements to streets and sidewalks to increase property values.

Policy CD-9. Support modification of existing commercial and residential structures and site improvements that implement the current land use policies as re-investment occurs in neighborhoods. Such modifications may consist of parking lot design, landscaping renovation, new coordinated signage, and site plan/building alterations that update structures to contemporary standards.

Policy CD-10. Sidewalks or walking paths should be provided along streets in established neighborhoods, where sidewalks have not been previously constructed. Sidewalk width should be ample to safely and comfortably accommodate pedestrian traffic and, where practical, match existing sidewalks.

Policy-CD-11. Vacant property should be maintained (landscaped, pruned, mowed, and litter removed) or screened to prevent adverse visual, economic, and health/safety impacts on the surrounding area.

Policy CD-12. Infill development, defined as new short plats of nine or fewer lots, should be encouraged in order to add variety, updated housing stock, and new vitality to neighborhoods.

Policy CD-13. Infill development should be reflective of the existing character of established neighborhoods even when designed using different architectural styles, and /or responding to more urban setbacks, height or lot requirements. Infill development should draw on elements of existing development such as placement of structures, vegetation, and location of entries and walkways, to reflect the site planning and scale of existing areas.

Policy CD-14. Architecture of new structures in established areas should be visually compatible with other structures on the site and with adjacent development.

Visual compatibility should be evaluated using the following criteria:

- a. Where there are differences in height (e.g., new two-story development adjacent to single-story structures), the architecture of the new structure should include details and elements of design such as window treatment, roof type, entries, or porches that reduce the visual mass of the structure.
- b. Garages, whether attached or detached, should be constructed using the same pattern of development established in the vicinity.
- c. Structures should have entries, windows, and doors located to maintain privacy in neighboring yards and buildings.

IV. New Development

Summary: Objectives and policies that address new development are intended to serve multiple purposes. First, concerns about new development “fitting in” to established areas of Renton have resulted in an increased awareness that site design and architecture, when planned to be compatible with the context of the neighborhood or commercial area, can make the “fit” of the new project more comfortable.

Second, these objectives and policies provide assistance to project proponents so when planning new development for Renton; they can be guided in their choices.

Third, city officials, who must make decisions regarding new projects, can use these objectives and policies to guide their review of project proposals.

Elements of new development represented by objectives and policies in this section include:

- A. Site planning
- B. Gateways
- C. Views and focal points
- D. Architecture
- E. Landscaping
- F. Streets, sidewalks, and streetscape
- G. Signs
- H. Lighting
- I. Urban Center

A. Site Planning

Summary: Site planning is the art and science of arranging structures, open space, and non-structural elements on land in a functional way so that the purpose of the development can be met, while keeping those elements in harmony with each other and with the context of the project.

Objective CD-D: New neighborhood development patterns should be consistent with Renton’s established neighborhoods and have an interconnected road network.

Policy CD-15. Land should be subdivided into blocks sized so that walking distances are minimized and convenient routes between destination points are available.

Policy CD-16. During land division, all lots should front streets or parks. Discourage single tier lots with rear yards backing onto a street. Where a single-tier plat is the only viable alternative due to land configuration, significant environmental constraints, or location on a principal arterial, additional design features such as a larger setbacks, additional landscaping, or review of fencing should be required.

- a. Evaluation of land configuration should consider whether a different layout of streets or provision of alleys is physically possible and could eliminate the need for a single-tier plat.
- b. Evaluation of environmental constraints should consider whether the location and extent of critical areas prevents a standard plat design.
- c. Review of fencing should ensure that the development does not “turn its back” to public areas.

Policy CD-17. Development should be designed (e.g. building orientation, setbacks, landscape areas and open space, parking, and outdoor activity areas) to result in a high quality development as a primary goal, rather than to maximize density as a first consideration.

Policy CD-18. Projects should only be approved at the upper end of density ranges when the following criteria are fully addressed in project level submission.

- a. Trees are retained, relocated, or planted to create sufficient vegetative cover to provide a landscape amenity, shade, and high quality-walking environment in an urban context.
- b. Lot size/configuration and lot coverage is sufficient to provide private recreation/outdoor space for each resulting lot.
- c. Structures can be sited so that entry, window, and door locations create and maintain privacy on adjoining yards and buildings. Architectural and landscape design should:
 - Prevent window and door openings looking directly into another structure,
 - Prevent over-reliance on fencing, or
 - Prevent projections of building elements into required setbacks in a pattern that reduces provision of light, visual separation, and/or require variances of modification of standards.

Density may be reduced within the allowed range to bring projects into compliance with these criteria.

Policy CD-19. During development, significant trees, either individually or in stands, should be preserved, replaced, or as a last option, relocated.

Policy CD-20. Development should be visually and acoustically buffered from adjacent freeways.

Policy CD-21. Development should have buildings oriented toward the street or a common area rather than toward parking lots.

Policy CD-22: When appropriate, due to scale, use, or location, on-site open space and recreational facilities in developments should be required.

Policy CD-23. Developments should be designed so that public access to and use of parks, open space, or shorelines, is available where such access would not jeopardize the environmental attributes of the area.

Policy CD-24. Site design of development should relate, connect, and continue design quality and site function from parcel to parcel.

Policy CD-25. Site design should address the effects of light, glare, noise, vegetation removal, and traffic in residential areas. Overall development densities may be reduced within the allowed density range to mitigate potential adverse impacts.

Policy CD-26. Streets, sidewalks, and pedestrian or bike paths should be arranged as an interconnecting network. The use of cul-de-sacs should be discouraged. A grid or “flexible grid” pattern of streets and pathways, with a hierarchy of widths and corresponding traffic volumes, should be used.

Policy CD-27. New streets should be designed to provide convenient access and a choice of routes between homes and parks, schools, shopping, and other community destinations.

Policy CD-28. Non-residential development should have site plans that provide street access from a principal arterial, consolidate access points to existing streets, and have internal vehicular circulation that supports shared access.

Policy CD-29. In mixed-use developments with ground-floor retail uses, residential parking areas should not conflict with pedestrian and vehicular access to the retail component of the project.

Policy CD-30. If transit service is available, parking requirements may be reduced or shared parking serving multiple developments may be allowed.

Policy CD-31. In mixed-use developments, residential uses should be connected to other uses through design features such as pedestrian walkways and common open space.

Policy CD-32. Neighborhoods should have human-scale features, such as pedestrian pathways and public spaces (e.g. parks or plazas) that have discernible edges, entries and borders.

B. Gateways

Summary: Community identity can be effectively communicated at City and district/neighborhood entries through the designation of these areas as “gateways.” Gateways are a means to call attention to the entrance to the City or a more specific geographic area and bid welcome.

Objective CD-E: Highlight entrances to the City through the use of the “Gateways” designation. Implementing code for Objective CD-E and policies CD-33, 34, and 35 will be put in place within five (5) years from the date of adoption of the GMA update.

Policy CD-33. Identify primary and secondary gateways to the City and develop them as opportunities arise.

Policy CD-34. The level of development intensity at a gateway should be used, with location, to determine whether it is a primary or secondary gateway.

Policy CD-35. Each gateway should have unique, identifiable design treatment in terms of landscaping, building design, signage, street furniture, paving, and street width. Special consideration of gateway function should be demonstrated through design of these elements.

C. Views and Focal Points

Summary: Views are a resource that should be preserved for public access to the greatest extent possible. Focal points should be created and used to enhance the community.

Objective CD-F: Protect and enhance public views of distinctive features from public streets and other focal points within the City and the surrounding area. Implementing code for Objective CD-F and Policies CD-36, CD-37, CD-38, CD-39 will be put in place within a five (5) year period from the date of adoption of the GMA update.

Policy CD-36. Scenic views and view corridors along roadways in the City should be identified and preserved through application of development standards.

Policy CD-37. Access from public roadways to views of features of distinction should be enhanced through the development of public viewpoints where appropriate.

Policy CD-38. Neighborhood identity should be established by featuring views, highlighting landmarks, or creating focal points of distinction.

Policy CD-39. Focal points should have a combination of public areas, such as parks or plazas; architectural features, such as towers, outstanding building design, transit stops, or outdoor eating areas; and landscaped areas. These features should be connected to pedestrian pathways.

D. Architecture

Summary: It is not the intent of these policies to dictate the architectural style of structures in the City of Renton. The Community Design architectural policies are intended to encourage design of structures that fit well into the neighborhood, reflect the physical character of Renton, mitigate potential negative impacts of development, and function well in meeting the needs of both the building occupant and the community.

Objective CD-G: Architecture should be distinctive and contribute to the community aesthetic.

Policy CD-40. Structures should be designed (e.g. building height, orientation, materials, color and bulk;) to mitigate potential adverse impacts, such as glare or shadows on adjacent less intense land uses and transportation corridors.

Policy CD-41. Rooftops that can be seen from public streets, parks, or open space should be designed to hide mechanical equipment and to incorporate high-quality roofing materials.

Policy CD-42. Design characteristics in larger new developments or individual building complexes should contribute to neighborhood and/or district identity.

Objective CD-H: Ensure that structures built in residential areas are consistent with the City's adopted land use vision and Purpose Statements for each Land Use Designation found in the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element, Residential Policies.

Objective CD-I: New commercial buildings should be architecturally compatible with their surroundings in terms of their bulk and scale, exterior materials, and color when existing development is consistent with the adopted land use vision and Purpose Statements for each Commercial Centers Designation in the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element, Center and Commercial Policies.

Policy CD-43. A variety of architectural design and detailing should be encouraged as long as site functions connect to adjacent development. Innovative use of building materials and finishes should be promoted.

Policy CD-44. Development should provide appropriate landscaping and façade treatment when located along designated City arterials or adjacent to less intense developments in order to mitigate potentially adverse visual or other impacts.

E. Landscaping

Summary: Landscaping is a key element of the City. It can be used to create distinctive character for developments, neighborhoods and along city streets; to frame views; to block unsightly views; or mitigate the scale of large buildings. It can also be used to reduce traffic noise levels and the effects of pollution.

Objective CD-J-: The City of Renton should adopt a citywide landscape plan that furthers the aesthetic goal of the City and provides guidance for future development and infrastructure improvements. Implementing code for Objective CD-J and Policies CD-45, CD-46 and CD-48 will be put in place within a five (5) year period from the date of adoption of the GMA update.

Policy CD-45. Existing mature vegetation and distinctive trees should be retained and protected in developments.

Policy CD-46. A comprehensive landscape architectural plan for the City should be developed. The plan should include recommendations for preferred street and landscape trees.

Policy CD-47. Landscape plans should take into consideration the potential impact of mature vegetation on significant views so that future removal of view-blocking trees will not be necessary.

Policy CD-48. A comprehensive landscape plan for the City should include areas such as those adjacent to freeways and major highways and other public rights-of-way. The installation of this landscaping should be encouraged.

Policy CD-49. Citywide development standards, for landscape design, installation, and maintenance should be developed.

Policy CD-50. Trees should be planted along residential streets, in parking lots requiring landscaping, and in other pervious areas as the opportunity arises. Trees should be retained whenever possible and maintained using Best Management Practices as appropriate for each type.

Policy CD-51. Landscaping is encouraged, and may be required, in parking areas to improve their appearance and to increase drainage control.

Policy CD-52. Landscape and surface water drainage plans should be coordinated to maximize percolation of surface water and minimize runoff from the site.

Objective CD-K: Site plans for new development projects for all uses, including residential subdivisions, should include landscape plans.

Policy CD-53. Landscape plans for proposed development projects should include public entryways, street rights-of-way, stormwater detention ponds, and all common areas.

Policy CD-54. Residential subdivisions and multi-family residential projects should include planting of street trees according to an adopted citywide landscape plan.

Policy CD-55. Maintenance programs should be required for landscaped areas in development projects, including entryways, street rights-of-way, stormwater retention/detention ponds, and common areas.

Policy CD-56. Surface water retention/detention ponds should be landscaped appropriately for the location of the facility.

F. Streets, Sidewalks, and Streetscape

Objective CD-L: Promote development of attractive, walkable neighborhoods and shopping areas by ensuring that streets are safe, convenient, and pleasant for pedestrians.

Policy CD-57. The design of pedestrian-oriented environments should address safety as a first priority. Safety measures should include generous separation of cars and pedestrians, reducing the number of curb cuts and driveways, having numerous, well-marked street crossings and providing street and sidewalk lighting.

Policy CD-58. Aesthetic improvements along street frontages should be provided, especially for properties abutting major streets and boulevards. Incentives should be provided for the inclusion of streetscape amenities including: landscaping, public art, street furniture, paving, signs, and planting strips in developing and redeveloping areas.

Objective CD-M: Develop a system of residential streets, sidewalks, and alleys that serve both vehicles and pedestrians.

Policy CD-59. A citywide street and sidewalk system should provide linkages within and between neighborhoods. Such system should not unduly increase pass-through traffic, but should create a continuous, efficient, interconnected network of roads and pathways throughout the City.

Policy CD-60. Criteria should be developed to locate pedestrian and bicycle connections in the City. Criteria should consider:

- a) Linking residential areas with employment and commercial areas;
- b) Providing access along arterials;
- c) Providing access within residential areas;
- d) Filling gaps in the existing sidewalk system where appropriate; and
- e) Providing access through open spaces and building entries to shorten walking distances.

Policy CD-61. Residential streets should be constructed to the narrowest widths (distance from curb to curb) feasible without impeding emergency vehicle access.

Policy CD-62. Landscaped parking strips should be considered for use as a safety buffer between pedestrians and moving vehicles along arterials and collector streets.

Policy CD-63. Intersections should be designed to minimize pedestrian crossing distance and increase safety for disabled pedestrians.

Policy CD-64. Evaluate existing intersections of arterial roadways for opportunities to create focal points, if such focal points do not reduce vehicular or pedestrian safety.

Policy CD-65. To visually improve the streetscape, increase the safety of perimeter sidewalks, and facilitate off-street parking, construction of alleys providing rear access to service entries and garages should be encouraged. Alleys are preferred in small-lot subdivisions to provide higher quality site-planning that allows garage access from the rear and reduces curb cuts and building mass on narrow lots.

Policy CD-66. Sidewalks or walking paths should be provided along residential streets. Sidewalk width should be ample to safely and comfortably accommodate pedestrian traffic.

Policy CD-67. Street trees should be used to reinforce visual corridors along major boulevards and streets.

Policy CD-68. Street trees should be protected. If removal is necessary for municipal purposes such as infrastructure improvements or maintenance, trees should be replaced with equivalent size and variety. Upon adoption of citywide standards, street trees should be upgraded consistent with those standards.

Policy CD-69. Appearance of parking lots should be improved by screening through appropriate combinations of landscaping, fencing, and berms.

Policy CD-70. Structural supports for overhead traffic signals should be designed to diminish visual impacts.

Policy CD-71. All utility lines should be placed underground.

G. Signage

Objective CD-N: Commercial signs in Renton should be regulated by citywide standards.

Policy CD-72: Sign regulations should direct the type, size, design, and placement of signs in order to ensure reasonable aesthetic and safety considerations.

Policy CD-73. All billboards with moving parts should be eliminated.

Policy CD-74. All bulky and unusually large or tall signs should be eliminated.

Policy CD-75. Sign placement should be limited to on-site locations.

Policy CD-76. Signs should be regulated as an integral part of architectural design. In general, signs should be compatible with the rest of the building and site design.

Policy CD-77. Consolidate information for mixed-use development to reduce the number of signs.

Policy CD-78. Locate signage to reduce light and glare impacts to residential areas.

Policy CD-79. Interpretive and directional signs for major landmarks, neighborhoods, and viewpoints should be established to enhance community identity.

H. Lighting

Objective CD-O: Lighting systems in public rights-of-way should be provided to improve safety, aid in direction finding, and provide information for commercial and other business purposes. Excess lighting beyond what is necessary should be avoided.

Policy CD-80. All exterior lighting should be focused and directed away from adjacent properties and wildlife habitat to prevent spill-over or glare.

Policy CD-81. Lighting should be used as one means to improve the visual identification of residences and businesses.

Policy CD-82. Lighting fixtures should be attractively designed to complement the architecture of a development, the site, and adjacent buildings.

Policy CD-83. Lighting within commercial and public areas should be located and designed to enhance security and encourage nighttime use by pedestrians.

I. Urban Center

Note: Community Design policies specifically applicable to the Urban Center are located in the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan.